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THE WORTH OF A MAN  
AN EXPOSITION OF MARK, 5:1-20

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The striking story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, while full of possibility of dramatic and vivid treatment, seems to present difficulties so great, theological, historical, and moral, that the preacher generally leaves it unused. One is involved in the difficult question of demoniacal possession, not only of men, but also of swine; the improbability of so great a catastrophe seems very great; and, as an ethical question, the destruction of other people's property seems hard to excuse; so that the preacher might well conclude that the strength of the sermon would be lost in the details of apologetic discussion. As a matter of fact, however, these difficulties are not serious for the homiletic use of the story. On the contrary, as is often the case, these are the very points that give it its highest value for the sermon.

The great significance of Jesus is his revelation of the spiritual power that is operative in this world. A few people recognize spiritual values; most of us in our little practical blindness do not very much perceive or understand them; and many men deny them altogether. This incident is a most impressive exemplification of the supreme faith of Jesus in the efficacy of spiritual forces to meet all human needs.

I. One is struck first of all with the *exhibition of abnormal humanity*. Here was a man (Matthew notes that there were two, but the variation is unimportant) who came rushing from the rocky tombs to meet Jesus and the Twelve as they disembarked from their boat. He was naked, frenzied, doubtless with glaring eye and disheveled hair. Matthew says he was "exceeding fierce so that no man could pass by that way." His body was covered with the hideous wounds where, in his paroxysms of rage, he had gashed himself with the sharp stones broken from the rocks. It would seem likely that this creature came yelling, dashing at the party, who had landed

near his haunts, with intent to do them injury. What was the matter with the man?

In that day people explained his condition easily by the statement that he was possessed of demons. They thought of those evil spirits as permitted to remain upon the earth if they could find bodies to inhabit. There seems to have been an idea that the demon dreaded disembodiment, and into the man, who by some evil had permitted him to enter, he came, and took possession of the personality. We should of course say that he was a dangerous lunatic of some kind. Alienists have distinguished many forms of mania, and the idea of a double personality is of not infrequent occurrence. No matter to diagnose the case too carefully, it is evident enough that here was a poor wretch with reason unhinged, fleeing from the abodes of men, untamable, dangerous—human abnormality at its worst.

As soon as we have said that, we have caught the first great suggestion of this story. Our problem, moral, physical, social, is the abnormal man. It meets us in a thousand forms. There are the unbalanced, the neurasthenic, the weak, the ignorant, the ineffective, the disheartened, the hypochondriac, the incompetent, the erring, the vicious, the brutal, the criminal. Our greatest problem is man: what can we do with him? As Jesus and the Twelve advance up the shore and see this poor creature rushing to meet them, they are facing that problem which, in some form or other, is the supreme problem of society—human abnormality.

II. The incident affords us further an *exhibition of the inability of society* to meet this problem. How helpless the Gerasenes were! How helpless we feel in the presence of the abnormal man! And it is very interesting to note that our helplessness has the same threefold character as that of the Gerasenes.

1. There was an ineffective theory. They said “demons,” and supposed that they had spoken the last word. Nothing can be done with a man who has demons. And how easy it is to suppose that an explanation is a solution! The Gerasenes felt no responsibility, for they had explained the case. We smile at the superstition: we have scientific explanation. We say heredity, degeneracy, racial tendency, class perversion. We examine the conditions and recognize that the abnormality is inevitable, and conclude, just as the Gerasenes did,

that nothing can be done with such people. Our explanation may be more scientific than theirs, but even a scientific explanation is not a solution, and the theory remains ineffective.

2. There was also ineffective good-will. We are definitely told that the good people had tried everything possible. They had brought him to the city and had clothed him. They had tried again and again, even when he would persist in tearing off his garments. And now that he was living in the tombs, it is probable that they were bringing him food and leaving it where he could obtain it. The reason for the continuance of human abnormality is not that good people have not tried to help the unfortunate. But what a pitiful history of helpless good-will it is—the alms, and the gifts, and the food, and the clothing, the charities, and sentimental endeavors, and weak efforts to do good! How hard and sacrificingly society has tried, and how little society has succeeded!

3. And there was repressive action. They had tried chains and shackles. Perhaps the poor maniac bore still upon his body the broken fetters as he rushed down upon the company of Galileans. Society has always its chains. If we cannot cure abnormality, we can shackle it. We can lock people in prisons and asylums. We can crush the movings of discontent with police and soldiers. What enormous effort has society spent in the never-ending task of preventing the abnormal from doing harm! The problem in all its horror is epitomized in that maniac driven from the face of men.

III. In contrast with all this, the story *exhibits the method of Jesus*. He is fully aware of the awful character of the problem before him. There can be no doubt that Jesus understands that the supreme human problem is the abnormal man. How does he meet the case?

1. Evidently he has a supreme confidence. The worst abnormality does not affright nor discourage him. Whatever may be thought of the historicity of some of the details of this incident, the full synoptic attestation of the main facts of the story would seem to make it certain that Jesus met the dangerous lunatic with calm confidence. And we shall not go too far, on the basis of the whole attitude of Jesus, if we decide that it was a faith in God, in himself, and in the man. Jesus faces human abnormality at its worst and believes that God is willing and able to cure it; he believes that he himself has the spiritual

power to be the agent of the cure; and he believes in the man as capable of cure. There we reach the supreme significance of Jesus. Abnormal conditions ought not to exist, need not exist, shall not exist. There is no such thing as a hopeless case. There is nobody beyond the reach of the mighty spiritual forces that are the supreme forces of the universe. A man with such a faith is invincible.

2. One sees in the method of Jesus, also, a sympathetic wisdom. The frenzied madman flies at the newcomer. Doubtless the calm approach of that strong, pure man, perhaps the only one whose eyes had never shown fear of the maniac, stopped him in his headlong course and silenced his loud cries. And as he came nearer, and felt the extraordinary influence of that personality, he was subdued. All this we can easily understand. Then Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. And there our superior wisdom seems to set us above the Master. He seems to have believed in demons, and we do not. But if one employs the method of Jesus, the healing of human ills does not wait upon the theory of their origin. Jesus appeals to the man, asks him his name, humors him in the idea that the demons may go into the swine, and with his authoritative "be-gone" compels the man to realize that he is freed. It is no matter how far Jesus diagnosed the case scientifically. Whatever evil the man had, he need not have. So Jesus believed, so he made the man believe. It was the spiritual appeal to his manhood, and the man in the maniac responded.

There was an account a little while ago of a most interesting treatment of municipal criminals in Cleveland, where they were put upon their honor, the appeal to their manhood was made, and in almost every case they were responding. A municipal judge in Chicago made very much the same appeal with extraordinary results. No thoughtful man today dares to say how far the spiritual appeal to real manhood may go in nervous prostration, in mental unbalance, in lunacy, in sickness, in vice, in crime.

3. But we must not omit an important element in the method of Jesus if the incident of the swine may be included, namely, the disregard of the cost. The commentators have labored hard to show how the swine could have perished, and how Jesus could be defended in their destruction. One apologist has intimated that the carcasses.

of the drowned animals might have been fished out of the water and their hams rendered marketable. So far as the fact is concerned, it is very possible that the swine might have been frightened by the last violent paroxysms of the maniac. But the important matter is not whether the swine were on the shore, but that they are in the story, and that the evangelists feel no concern to apologize for their loss. The labored efforts of the commentators never occurred to the men who were recording the salvation of a human life. What did it matter how many swine were killed?—a man was saved. In that same Cleveland experiment an objector asked whether it was not a more costly way of dealing with criminals; would the municipal farm make expenses? And the answer was shot back at him, "We are not making expenses, we are making men."

IV. But the Gerasenes thought otherwise. One of the most suggestive elements in the narrative is the *exhibition of society's dread of the cost*. The swineherds fled to the city with the news, and the people who had tried to tame the madman flocked out to see the wondrous sight. And there was the man clothed—the restored personality seeking seemly conditions of life—and in his right mind, normally complete. And when they heard how it happened, "and concerning the swine," they besought Jesus to depart. How glaringly unfit it seems—the dismissal of the benefactor! It is the only instance in Jesus' ministry where people asked him to go away. And it is the only instance where his ministry cost the people anything. Society is ready for reforms in abnormal life, but they must not cost too much. At Gerasa, and today, the abnormality must continue because property is esteemed above personality. It halts all our reforms. Men have asked, without perceiving the hideous irony of the question: who would do the menial work if all were educated? Tenements, sweat-shops, child-labor, preventable accidents, the white-slave trade, ought to be abolished, but there must be no interference with vested interests. Have we not recently been reminded of Macaulay's famous saying "The law of gravitation would not now be accepted if it interfered with vested interests"?

This story of the swine that has troubled the commentators comes to us with the demand to have done with our hypocrisy and ask ourselves plainly the question: are we willing to pay the cost of salvation

and reform? As a matter of fact, do not the stockholders in the swine-company prefer to have Jesus go away, and they will contribute from their dividends to provide the madman with clothes, with food, and with shackles?

V. Yet there really was no cost. We actually see here *the worth of the emancipated man*. What did Gerasa lose that day? A strong, good man is worth more to any community than hogs. The maniac has become a social being. He is ready to go with Jesus. He who fled from the face of man seeks the company of those whom, an hour before, he would have murderously attacked. He not only ceases to be a menace but desires to enter into social relations. A negative force is changed into a positive force. And more than that, the maniac becomes an apostle of salvation. He is willing to forego the social advantage of the company of Jesus and to betake himself to ministry among his friends. He becomes active in the very undertaking of which he was himself the beneficiary. To recur once more to the Cleveland experiment, the municipal criminals were found to be active agents in the reclamation of other men.

So the cure of the demoniac may suggest the possibilities of spiritual forces, unselfishly and wisely put into operation, to meet the disease, the pauperism, the misery, the vice, the crime, and all the abnormalities of today; and while it warns us that doubtless we must be prepared for heavy cost, it cheers us with the assurance of untold gain.